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Currency and Coins from Vermont's Period of Independence

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While Britain paid some attention to gold and silver coinage at home, even there she relatively ignored copper coinage until almost 1800. There are over four hundred known varieties of counterfeit half-pennies from England alone, so one can be sure the void to be filled was far worse in North America. Besides, Crown taxes siphoned off the scarce hard money, as did the refusal of mother-country merchants to ship unless paid in gold and silver. So British North America (and French North America, too) were always short of money for commerce and change.

On the other hand, in Spanish Central and South America, much gold and silver were found or produced. Mints were established as a way of accounting and keeping track of the treasure, even if the bulk was shipped off to Spain. Mexico was, and is, a great silver producer and the Mexico City mint struck numberless silver dollar size coins of eight reales, the famous "pieces of eight". New Englanders illegally managed to trade with Spanish territory, especially the West Indies, and of course brought back as much hard money as possible. So, even though English, French, Portuguese, Dutch and other gold and silver coins circulated, the Spanish 8-reales became the best known and favorite trade coin.

Smaller silver coins, for instance 4-reales and 2-reales, were not so common, so the practice arose of cutting the 8-reales into wedge-shaped pieces for change. The smallest was "one bit"; a quarter-round was "two-bits", which is why we sometimes still term our U. S. quarter "two bits".

Other indications of the lack of circulating media are easy to find. In the earliest years wampum was made legal tender and used both among the colonists and for trading with the Amerinds. In 1652 Massachusetts tried to help itself by striking silver coins (the New England, then the Oak, Willow, and Pine Tree shillings), but the Crown said "Stop!". In fact, the colony didn't stop until 1682. Usually it was careful to have any new dies still read 1652. To finance the military expedition against the French fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, Massachusetts, in 1745, turned to paper money, which promptly depreciated and was only retired after some time with help from the Crown.

Between sheer necessity in the absence of circulating media, it is a bit awkward in trading a calf to have a leg returned as change and the fact that it was quicker and easier to do a little printing than it was to strike coins, one colony after another tried paper money. All the original thirteen did . . . and the paper quickly depreciated and passed at a discount. Rhode Island even repudiated much of hers, so that it went to zero value until recent times when collectors began to seek it. The Continental Congress, desperate to finance the Revolutionary War, went the way of paper for thirty-six issues beginning 1 Sept. 1777 and ending 1 Sept. 1780. A Vermont statute of 27 February 1787 established the legal tender value of that paper in Vermont in equivalence to the hard-money Spanish silver dollar: the table runs from 100 for the first issue to 7,200 for the last. Small wonder the expression arose "Not worth a Continental!"

Currency

Vermont was quite aware of that dismal record nearby, but had run out of confiscated Tory and Yorkist properties to sell in order to help support its government. Besides, insulated from the reach of Congress, Vermont's economy was in decent condition. "For the purpose of carrying on the war and the enlargement of the paper currency" the Legislature decided that matters would be helped by circulating more media, and so in February, 1781, read a bill for 25,155 of bills of credit (=notes, or paper currency). There were to be the same quantity of each denomination, which were to be 1 shilling, 1 sh. 3 pence, 2 sh. 6d. (= half a crown), 5 sh. (=one crown), 10 sh. 20 sh. (= one pound), 40 sh., and 3 pounds (= 60 sh.). That amounted to a direction to the printer to put one of each denomination on one sheet of paper, and so to print 3,600 sheets.

Appointed to the supervising committee, to choose designs and oversee the printing, were Edward Harris, Matthew Lyon, and Ezra Stiles, Jr. Countersigning was to be by two signatures from among Jno. Fasset, J. Porter, and E. Walbridge. Peter Olcott, a signature I have never seen is mentioned by Eric P. Newman, a leading numismatic researcher and scholar. Judah P. Spooner and Timothy Green, probably in May, 1781, did the printing at Westminster, Vermont, on their second-hand press, which turns out to have been first used in Massachusetts and to have been the first press to reach English-speaking North America. It is now on view at the Museum of the Vermont Historical Society in Montpelier.

On the face of each note is printed that it will be redeemed "by the 1st Day of June, A.D. 1782". Denominations from 10 shillings and less are printed to say they will be redeemed "in Silver at Six Shillings and Eight Pence per Ounce"; denominations from 20 shillings and up are printed to say they will be redeemed "in Spanish Milled Dollars at Six Shillings each or gold or silver coins equivalent". With a Spanish silver dollar worth over 70 pence, it was certainly impossible to use such to redeem even a 5 shilling note worth only 60 pence. Though a 10 shilling note (=120 pence) could have used the language of the high denominations, for unknown reasons it was printed with the language of the low-end denominations.

The record shows £ 24,750, 8 shillings, and 9 pence of the notes in fact issued. In early October, 1781, a legislative committee reported that £ 21,300 of the notes were in actual circulation. By 26 October, presumably after a tax date, Timothy Brownson, John Fasset, and Matthew Lyon, as a legislative committee, were able to report that they had burned £ 10,000 of redeemed notes. Looking ahead, the Legislature in February, 1782, authorized the State Treasurer to burn redeemed notes, and then soon decreed that after 1 June 1782 (the printed redemption date) the notes would no longer be legal tender for any payments except to the State Treasurer.

Proving that some notes were circulated beyond the expiration date, the Legislature in February, 1783, authorized the State Treasurer to issue notes to cover them. But basically the Vermont notes were extraordinary for the times in that all presented were swiftly redeemed in good silver hard money and the issue essentially retired.

Nonetheless, a few Vermont notes still exist today, fortunately some in every denomination, demonstrating that some were hidden away, overlooked, forgotten, or possibly already held aside in sentimental or collector hands. But they were still so few that an 1882 numismatic auction catalog cheerily says of the Vermont note it is describing that such are "scarce as hen's teeth"! Relatively still true, for my recent census effort disclosed under forty until I learned of four completed sets, which add thirty-two specimens and put the total around seventy-five specimens. One set is reported in the hands of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, and another at the Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. The other two are in private collections outside Vermont.

As to what I call the "check-like" Vermont fiscal paper, it is the research of Dr. Douglas B. Ball that has recently developed its story. This well-known

numismatic scholar and paper money expert mentioned to me that he considers this fiscal paper to have been the successor to the unique notes of February 1781 and that they passed similarly from hand to hand as currency.

It is my memory that he distinguishes two series under Ira Allen, Vermont's first Treasurer, but I do not know the basis. The example I have seen prints "Sunderland" as the location of the Treasurer's office. Since Ira Allen became active in the Burlington-Colchester area, one might suppose that the second series came from his new office location.

The third series then would be under Vermont's second Treasurer, Samuel Mattocks, whose printed forms give Tinmouth as the location of his Treasurer's office. Mattocks served for thirteen years, beginning with 1787.

By their own terms, these check-like instruments represented the expressed value in regard to taxes. One of Ira Allen's specifies "a tax, granted by the legislature at their session in Bennington, in March, 1784, of two pence on the pound". One from Samuel Mattocks names "Hard Money Taxes".

Let us turn now from Vermont's paper money to Vermont's copper coinage of the period of independence; here is a more complex story.

Coins

The coins bear dates from 1785 to 1788, and yet important aspects remained unknown for 90 years. Indeed, just recently a few more pieces of information have surfaced. Nonetheless, we can start with a spectacular, uncontested fact: among the newly independent states, Vermont was the first actually to begin striking coins!

Reuben Harmon, Jr., of Rupert had served in some of Vermont's first General Assemblies and knew how to proceed. On 10 June 1785 he petitioned the Vermont Legislature, then meeting in Norwich, for the franchise "to coin a quantity of copper". Even as most of his contemporaries, he was well aware of the shortage of circulating media, but unlike them he had track of some copper and thought there should be an interesting profit in the difference between his labor and costs to make up coins on the one hand and what the coppers on the other hand would buy if officially sanctioned.

The Legislature responded by promptly appointing a committee consisting of John Strong of Addison, Isaac Tichenor of Bennington, and Samuel Williams of Rutland, to whom was joined Ira Allen on behalf of the Governor's Council (the forerunner of today's Senate). Though a legislature may be properly defined as a deliberative body, in those days it moved with dispatch: by June 15 a law was passed giving Harmon a free franchise for two years beginning 1 July 1785, subject to a £ 5,000 bond, which he signed on June 16.

The Act had been a bit hasty, for it specified that the coppers were to weigh $1/3$ of a Troy ounce (= 6 pennyweights and 16 grains, or nowadays 10.37 grams), which was soon realized to be appreciably more in value than such copper coins and tokens as were then in use in North America. There were not yet any state or U.S. coins, just some British half pennies and various privately produced pieces that came to be called "Bungtowns". So, correction was made by a further Act on 27 October 1785 when the Legislature was meeting in Windsor. That changed the required weight to "not less than 4 pennyweights and 15 grains (= 7.19 grams). Interestingly, this turned out to be lighter than the standards later adopted by Massachusetts and New Jersey, respectively "6 pennyweights" (= 9.33 grams) and "6 pennyweights and 6 grains" (= 9.72).

Because Vermont coppers are not found at or above the 10.37 gram weight first specified, it is evident not much production could have been achieved before the second Act. On the other hand, there are many surviving Vermont coppers at a weight above 8 grams, which suggests that "quality controls" were lax; or perhaps it was just a matter of seeing that there were about 50 Vermont coppers to the Troy pound, with some overweight; or possibly it was a matter of meeting the franchise "safely" and keeping deliberately above the statutory minimum of 7.19 grams. Some of the worn survivors today fall below that weight.

In any case, Harmon was having start-up problems. He built a 16 ft. x 18 ft. building in Rupert alongside the Mill Brook tributary of the Metawee River. Eventually he equipped it with a furnace for heating the copper, machinery for rolling out sheets, other machinery to stamp out blanks (= "planchets") from the sheets, and of course some sort of screw press by which to strike the dies against a planchet to produce a coin.

To get dies made, Harmon employed the New York City silver and goldsmith firm of VanVoorhis, Bailey & Coley. It is thought that William Coley, who eventually moved up to Vermont, did the work on all the early die varieties. To him are ascribed with certainty the "landscape" types of 1785 and 1786 and the "bust right Baby Head" of 1786. He seems also to have done the "bust left" types of 1786 and 1787. (See illustration page 47).

While Coley's "landscapes" were imaginative, for the backsides he just plagiarized the reverses of the 1783 and 1785 "Nova Constellatio" tokens, even to copying for 1785 the "blunt rays" on the 1783 Novas and shifting in 1786 to the "pointed rays" that had appeared on the 1785 Novas. He also plagiarized the reverses of his "Baby Head" and "bust left" varieties. For example seated Miss Liberty, complete with shield, staff in one hand, and proffered branch in the other, is plainly copied from the British halfpenny's Britannia. But Coley did carefully omit the Union Jack decoration seen on Britannia's shield. Instead, for the "Baby Head" he used four little sheaves of grain, and I happened to be the lucky one to discover so recently as 1974 that for at least a few "bust lefts" he used a larger single sheaf of grain.

With the two years of the franchise ending before much production could be achieved, and doubtless very little profit realized, if any, Harmon on 23 October 1786 petitioned the Vermont Legislature, then in session at Rutland, for more time. Again a committee was appointed, this time consisting of John Bridgman of Wardsborough, Nathaniel Chipman of Tinmouth, Silas Goodrich of Dorset, and, for the Council, General Ebenezer Walbridge. They made their report on October 25 and an Act was passed that very same day granting an additional three free years, followed by a further five years to which would apply a fee of 2½% of whatever was produced then under the franchise. That would have carried to June 1795, well beyond what turned out to be Vermont's date of admission to the United States (1791), a result long aimed at as shown by the propaganda legend on the reverse of Vermont's 1785 and 1786 "landscape" coins: "Stella Quarta Decima" (Latin for the "fourteenth star").

This Act of 25 October 1786 specified a head for one side, with some abridged form of "AUCTORITATE VERMONTENSIIUM" (Latin for "by the authority of Vermont"), and a woman for the other side, with "INDE: ET: LIB" (an abridged form of the Latin for "Independence and Freedom"). Carrying out new law, Coley's first attempt at a bust was the unique and amateurish "Baby Head" (a "bust right") that delights collectors today. The "bust lefts" followed, imitating the halfpennies of George II, which always faced left. Modern studies say that these "bust lefts" give evidence that the Rupert mint tried to apply some of the precocious, 50-years-ahead-of-their-times "hubbing" techniques that Abel Buel was developing just then for the production of Connecticut coppers . . . plausible enough when we discover that Abel's son, William Buel, is found to have come up to Rupert in 1786.

On 18 April 1787, Capt. Thomas Machin formed a partnership to mint coins at his "mill" in Newburgh, N.Y. Actually, Machin, once a British army engineering officer, is most widely remembered today for having fought on the side of the Colonies and for being the chap who carried out the stringing of a stout iron chain across the Hudson River, guarded by the guns of West Point, so that the British were unable to cut the Colonies in two by simply sailing their sea power up the Hudson River from New York City to Albany. Among Machin's partners was James F. Atlee, an experienced die sinker with a former connection to the Rahway, N.J., mint. Atlee's skill was certainly the bait that drew Harmon's Vermont group into a new, 10-man partnership with Machin's group. The quill-pen-

written partnership agreement is a beautiful document, complete with red blobs of sealing wax, that may be seen today in the library of the American Numismatic Society of N.Y. It is now believed that all Vermont dies from July 1787 on, both for the Rupert, Vermont, mint and for the Newburgh, N.Y., mint, were the work of Atlee. And so, with Newburgh and 1787 the fun and puzzles of Vermont coinage really begin.

Since Machin's Mill's earliest products were counterfeit British halfpennies, Atlee had made punches to imprint a seated Britannia on the working dies from which coins would actually be struck. As would be normal for that purpose, her shield showed the Union Jack, plainly depicting the crosses of St. George (for England) and St. Andrew (for Scotland). When Atlee turned to making Vermont dies, he simply continued using his earlier punches, and so "Miss Liberty" comes out with Union Jacks on her shield. In 1870-71 this was neither realized nor understood, so when some New Yorkers imputed a Tory connection to Vermont's coinage, newspaper letters to the editors recorded Vermont indignation. (See Appendix).

Actually, the imputation was strengthened by some coin examples now known to have come from Machin's Mill. They are what are called numismatic "mules" from combining on one coin the dies from two different, supposedly separate series:

A) Machin's Mill's first effort under the new contract in 1787 produced what is today the commonest Vermont copper of all, a "mule" with a crisp new "VERMON AUCTORI" dies for the obverse, but a tampered (probably lightly touched to the grindstone) counterfeit British halfpenny worn die for the reverse. Today it is commonly referred to as the "Britannia reverse" variety. My guess is that it was a shortcut for getting quickly into production, saving the time it would take the die sinker to make a whole new reverse die. Even on an unworn coin the "BRITAN" and the date are badly obscured, but the "NIA" shows up fairly well.

B) Believe it or not, Machin's Mill managed the opposite "mule" with a 1788 die. This time a worn Vermont "INDE ET LIB" was used for the reverse in combination with a clear obverse "bust right" showing "GEORGIVS III REX", the front die for a counterfeit British halfpenny. Very jolly, what, to find George free and independent!

Another curiosity was that a New York Act of 20 April 1787 began to drive out Nova Constellatio coppers as too light. Since they were nonetheless usually heavier than the required weight of Vermont coppers, the Rupert mint gathered up some and fed them thru their press. The Vermont dies rarely obliterated all evidence of the precursor coin. Also, when "Irish halfpennies" struck in England under franchise were rejected by the Irish, in part for being lightweight, many kegs were brought to North America. Machin's Mill overstruck some with Vermont dies. It is startling, to say the least, to see an Irish harp's strings right in the middle of a Vermont copper.

Although the last dies made for Vermont coppers show a 1788 date, it is fairly certain that the Rupert mint kept using them into 1789. When Rupert closed down, its dies were taken to Newburgh, where minting continued a little longer. Two things had happened to dim profit prospects: A) The value of copper sagged so drastically, finally to about one quarter of its former value, that intrinsic value was spoiled and the coins reduced to undesired tokens. B) In 1788 New Hampshire became the ninth state to sign the new Constitution thus placing it into operation. Since that new Constitution reserved coinage to the United States of America, state and private mints would shortly be out in the cold.

In its last spasm of using up copper and existing dies, Machin's Mill minted some more numismatic mules: A) a Vermont die combined with a Connecticut "AUCTORI CONNEC" die, and B) a Vermont die combined with an "IMMUNE COLUMBIA" die bought from the New Jersey Morristown mint after it closed (but the die was probably originally from England).

Between the two mints, thirty-nine varieties of Vermont coppers have been distinguished today — twenty-five from the Rupert mint, twelve from Machin's

Mill, one struck at both (first at Rupert, later at Newburgh), and one deemed a contemporary (1780's) counterfeit. Oddly, of about a dozen known examples of the counterfeit, some are struck and some are cast. In either case they are unique in having the date 1785 inboard of the words circling the margin.

A few more examples of die differences will help demonstrate what makes a distinguishable variety. There are two varieties of 1785 landscape "VERMONTS. RES. PUBLICA": in one a ray of the rising sun points directly at the period following "RES.", but in the other the ray points distinctly into the space between that period and the P of "PUBLICA". Or, instead of the common situation of the reverse showing "INDE: (head of seated Miss Liberty) ET: LIB:", one variety has "INDE* ET (head of seated Miss Liberty) LIB*", and still another variety has "*ET LIB* (head of seated Miss Liberty) *INDE". (See illustrations on page 53). Other variant characteristics are distinctive die breaks and varied punctuation, running from periods, stars, plus signs, 5-dot cluster (∴), semi-colons, or mixture of them, to no punctuation.

Several numbering systems have been worked out for Vermont coins. Crosby's was earliest; its numeral plus letter is sometimes found in white library ink right on Vermont coppers from old collections. Ryder published in 1919-20 and organized the subject to thirty-one varieties. Richardson published in 1947, preserving the Ryder numbers, but adding 4 varieties, and so reached #35. The \$1.00 reprint of his illustrated essay is still available from the American Numismatic Association, P.O. Box 2366, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80901. Since then #36, #37, and #38 have been found; and #39 is the mule with Connecticut.

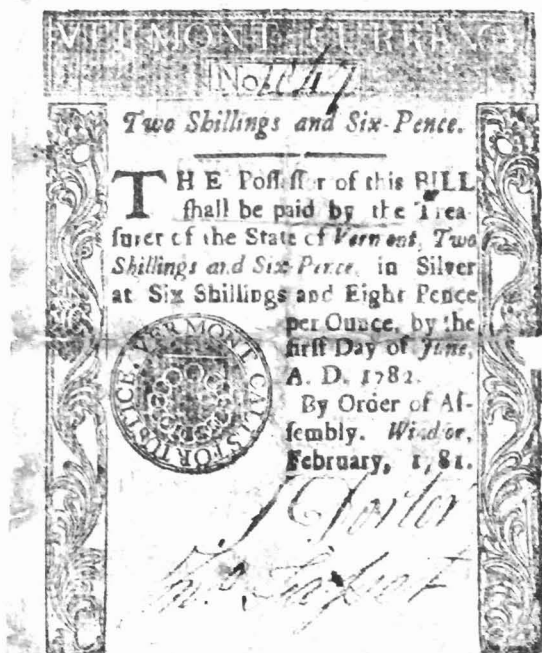
Breen and Bressett collaborated on an informative numbering system that distinguished the Rupert varieties from the Newburgh varieties. Though they prepared photo plates, they did not publish. However, their sequencing shows up in the latest and most definitive work by Kenneth E. Bressett, who has now assigned a number for each different obverse and a letter for each different reverse. That work is his "Vermont Copper Coinage" with over four full pages of excellent photos.*

In the recent auction (November 1979) of the first part of Johns Hopkins University's Garrett Collection record high prices were achieved: an uncirculated Vermont copper went for \$10,000. On the other hand, the numismatic press almost every week shows at least one Vermont copper for sale, sometimes down to just a few dollars. Rare varieties, even in very inferior condition, whenever they appear, are usually only available from probably \$400 to over \$1,000. Indeed, common varieties in the nicer conditions also are likely to run from \$300 to \$700 or more.

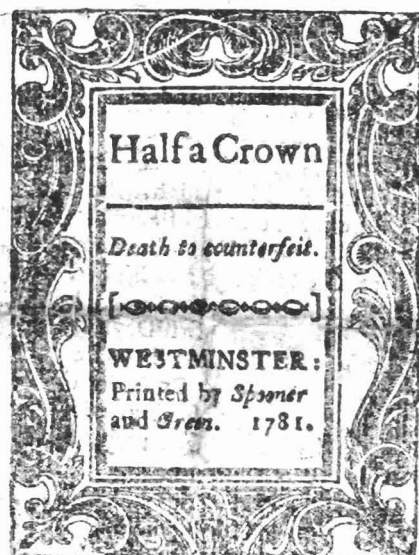
Bressett estimates that the population of Vermont coppers still existing is in the 4,000 to 5,000 range.

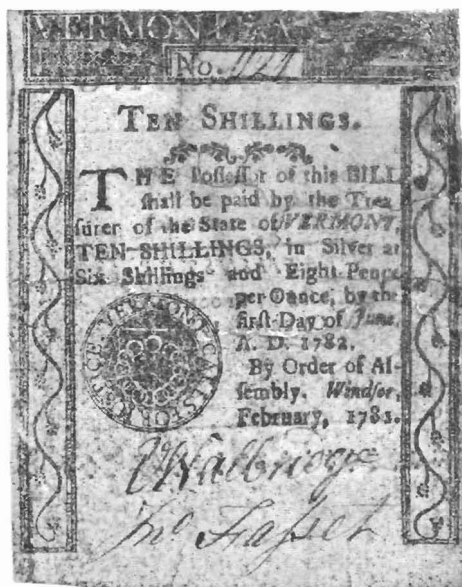
There is a final commentary of sorts on the historical importance and desirability of genuine Vermont coppers, and be warned: there are in existence some fake Vermont coppers. Some of the fakes are crudely cast promotional pieces, but some "electrotypes" from the 1870s, or so, are dangerously good counterfeits. These last were not originally intended to deceive but to fill holes in a gentleman's collection to indicate what the coin looked like; later they "escaped" because heirs didn't know the difference. Any reproductions produced in the last few years, or hereafter, must be stamped "COPY" in letters of no less than specified size in order to meet the requirements of the U.S. "Hobby Protection Act". Anyway, prices having inflated sharply or the dollar having just as sharply lost value, whichever view you prefer, the pressure to counterfeit has doubtless increased.

*Chapter 11, pages 173-198, of "Studies on Money in Early America", Eric P. Newman, Editor, and Richard G. Doty, Associate Editor, a 1976 American Bicentennial effort by the American Numismatic Society of N.Y., Broadway at 155/156th St., NYC, N.Y. 10032. Originally the book cost \$27.50, and was worth it; now it can be had for \$10.50 plus \$1.00 for postage and handling, and so it has even greater worth.

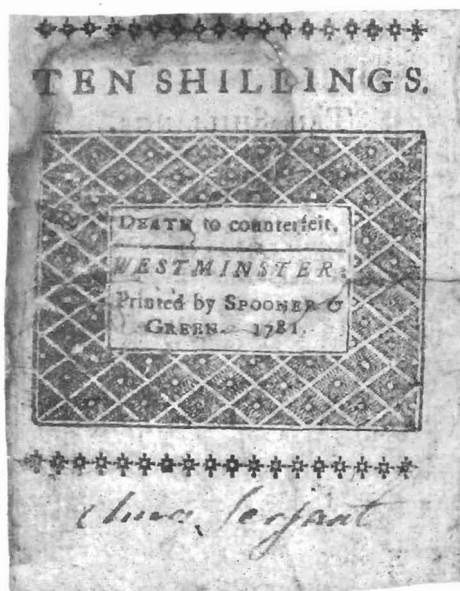


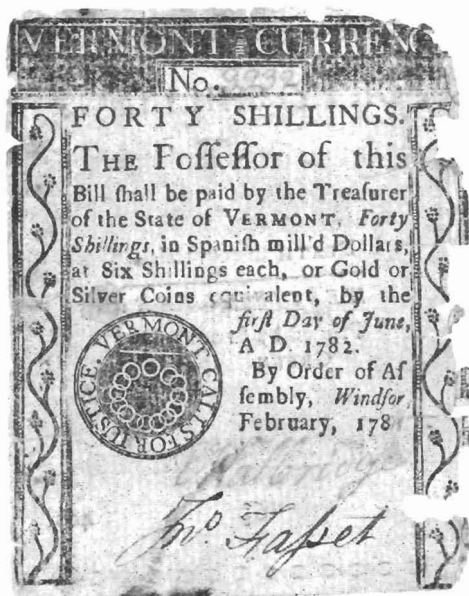
Countersigning was to be by two signatures for Vermont paper currency. According to Eric Newman, four different signatures were possible: John Fasset, J. Porter, Peter Olcott, and E. Walbridge. This note was redeemable at a different value of silver from the 20 shilling, 40 shilling and £3 notes, the highest denominations.



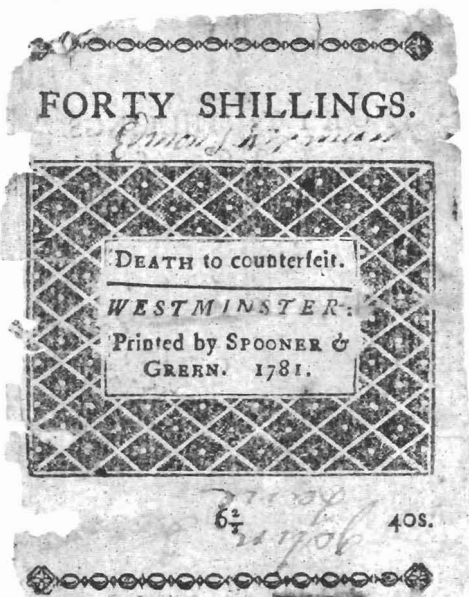


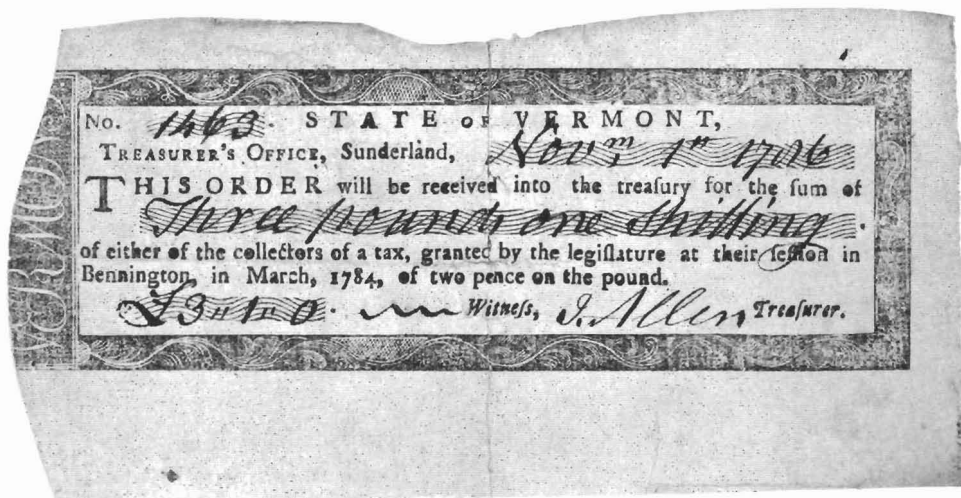
This 10 shilling note is interesting for having the same redemption terms as the lower denomination notes. Theoretically it could have been redeemed at the rate applying to the higher denomination. The advantage would be a slight premium in silver using this note over a higher denomination one.



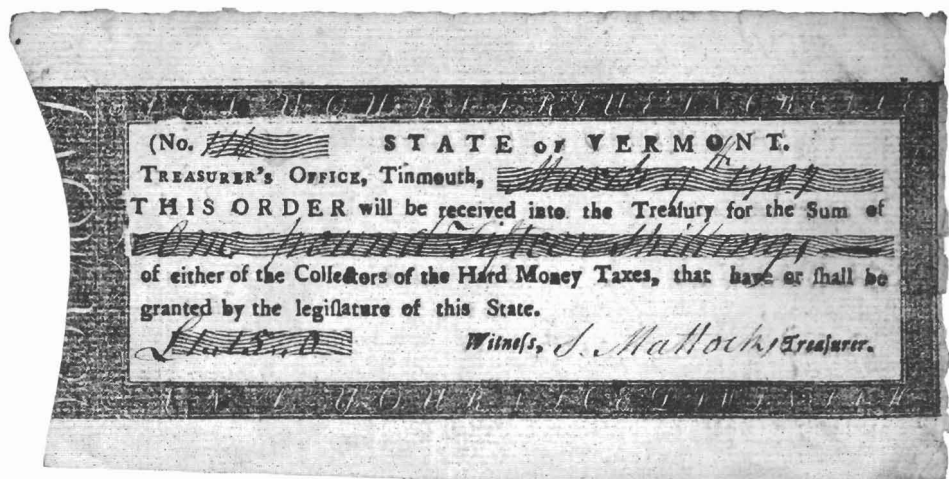


The usual warning of "Death to counterfeit" is indicated on this note. This was a standard practice for notes. The circles in this note are quite interesting. They show thirteen joined circles and one isolated circle at the top, which represent the thirteen colonies and Vermont. These notes were issued by the Republic.





In the opinion of Douglas B. Ball, these notes are successors to the Republic of Vermont notes and were issued by the state of Vermont. According to Ball there are three varieties of this note. Partridge speculates that there are two Ira Allen varieties because Allen moved his office from Sunderland to Colchester.



This note shows the signature of the successor to the first treasurer, (Ira Allen.) Samuel Mattocks was a leading citizen of Tinmouth and treasurer of the State for thirteen years from 1787-1800.



These Nova Constellatio tokens from Gouverneur Morris' private venture became the model for the reverses of the landscape coins of Vermont. The obverse shows the blunt rays.





This 1785 Nova Constellatio shows the other variety, the pointed rays. Some Vermont coppers were later overstruck on these coins.





RR #2

BB #1

Bressett #1-A

Examples of Vermont landscape coins. The pointed and blunt rays are obvious differences. The number of trees vary from 7 to 9 depending upon coin varieties. Also can be seen a rising sun with eyes and a nose, as well as traditional rays.





RR #7

BB #5

Bressett #5-E

Examples of Vermont landscape coins. The pointed and blunt rays are obvious differences. The number of trees vary from 7 to 9 depending upon coin varieties. Also can be seen a rising sun with eyes and a nose, as well as traditional rays.





RR #9

BB #7

Bressett #7-F

The distinctive Baby Head variety. The Act of 25 October 1786 merely specified a head for one side and on the reverse a woman. The innovation resulted in the crude juvenile head shown above.





This is an example of Bust Left treatment of George II and was used as a model for Vermont Bust Lefts. These are from the Royal mint in the Tower of London.





This is an example of the Bust Right treatment with the traditional Britannia on the back. The shield has the Union Jack. In the Vermont Bust Left varieties, all three varieties show plain shields, or at least no Union Jack.





These counterfeit English half pennies were struck at Newburgh, New York, by the Machin's Mill. Notice that the Union Jack, although badly worn, is still discernible. On Vermont coins it is not present on the Bust Lefts but does appear on the Bust Rights. (For a spirited discussion of this matter see the letter at the end of this article, sent to the Free Press and Times and written in 1870.)





RR #10

BB #8

Bressett #8-G

An example of Vermont Bust Left. The specimen does not show the single sheaf of grain which appears on some examples of this variety. The union Jack does not appear on the shield. The coin imitates the George II half penny.





RR #14

BB #12

Bressett #10-K

1787 Bust Right Vermont Copper. Vermont used the same die for busts in 1787 and 1788. This is the first time that the Union Jack appears on a Vermont coin.





RR #20

BB #16

Bressett #10-L

1788 Bust Right. Its reverse shows the more common phrasing and word order.



These are Vermont numismatic mules, combining the fronts and backs of two different coins. The first effort of Machin's Mill under their new contract with Reuben Harmon and his partners. The 1787 example is shown. These are two of the four mules involving Vermont dies and are the most common.



RR #13

BB #101

Bressett #17-V





RR #31

BB #110

Bressett #24-U





RR #18

BB #103

Bressett #19-X



RR #29

BB #107

Bressett #22-U

These are examples of die breaks in Vermont coppers. The breaks are diagnostic of the variety and not much production was achieved before the die became completely unusable.



RR #18

BB #103

Bressett #19-X



RR #27

BB #102

Bressett #18-W

Examples of word order. The normal word order is INDE, head of liberty, ET LIB. These two examples show changes: In the first, ET LIB is left of Miss Liberty's head and only INDE is to the right. In the second INDE * ET are left of Miss Liberty's head and only INDE is to the right. A third variation having INDE to the left of Miss Liberty's head and ET LIB to the right is the common word order.

OVERSTRIKES



RR #12

BB #13

Bressett #11-K

Here are the obverse and reverse of a Vermont copper struck over a pre-existing Nova Constellatio. Notice respectively the monogram US relic and the central eye.



Here are the results of striking Vermont dies over pre-existing Irish half pennies. Notice respectively the G 1 and REX of GEORG IVS 111 REX and the crown relic.



RR #18

BB #103

Bressett #19-X



RR #25

BB #24

Bressett #16-U



An example of Irish half penny, 1775, upon which Vermont overstrikes were made.



APPENDIX

An article that appeared in *The Daily Free Press and Times* for September 22, 1870 reported that some coins bearing the date 1785 with a George III head were issued and attributed to Vermont. They were called the Tory cent.

As the previous article by Mr. Partridge has shown, such was indeed the case, but with a different interpretation. A letter to the editor in response to the 1870 article vehemently denies the allegation.

The Rutland Historical Society Quarterly editors have included these documents to make all of us aware of the need for careful research based on solid research instead of political and wishful thinking.

THE DAILY FREE PRESS AND TIMES EVENING EDITION Burlington

Thursday Evening, Sept. 22, 1870

A Fresh Attempt to Asperse Vermont

Within a few years past a small number of persons in New York appear to have deliberately undertaken the task of beclouding the history of Vermont by unfounded insinuations and attacks upon the fair fame of its early leaders and government. We had an example of this in the recent abortive effort of Mr. DeCosta to make it appear that Col. Ethan Allen was not the hero of Ticonderoga, but that somebody else — it mattered not who — was. The same clique of writers have recently undertaken to assert or insinuate that the government of our State, during the confederation, authorized the coinage of copper money *with British inscriptions or devices*. No charge of the kind was made at the period when the coins are supposed to have been issued, nor indeed was ever insinuated till within the last dozen or fifteen years. It is of purely modern invention, and we believe has not the slightest foundation in fact to rest upon.

An article appeared in the Montpelier *Argus & Patriot* of August 25th, apparently written in the interest of this New York coterie, by one professing to be a Vermonter. The writer assumed the truth of certain unfounded statements, chiefly of his own creation, and then under the guise of friendship to the State, made lame apologies for them. In this way he covertly and dishonestly sought to cast a doubt over the conduct of our State government, and a cloud upon the fame of the Pioneers of Vermont. If this was not his object, we are at a loss to discover what it could be. We are glad to present to our readers in another column, over the signature of Rupert, a refutation of the false assertions and unfounded assumptions so put forth. The article comes to us from a source entitling it to all confidence. We publish it in the full belief that it sets forth the simple truth concerning the matters to which it relates; and we are confident that our Vermont

readers will thank the writer for so clearly and squarely meeting an attempt to asperse the Vermonters of the last century, who laid broadly and well the foundations of the reputation of Vermont as a pure, honest and patriotic commonwealth, and whose fair fame is a heritage which their children will not lightly permit to be impaired.

"Vermont Mint of 1785"

To the Editor of the Free Press & Times.

An article appeared in the *Argus and Patriot*, of Montpelier, for August 25th, under the above title, containing, either from ignorance or some other less excusable reason, many gross misstatements of fact and inference; and as the whole tone of the article is misleading, I propose to offer a few comments upon some of its statements.

The writer says: "It may not be generally known to Vermonters that after the close of the revolutionary war our State was a pioneer in the establishment of a mint at Rupert, with a *branch in Ulster Co., N. Y.*, for the purpose of coining copper money.

As this sentence contains an essential untruth, now for the first time promulgated, it is easy to believe that "it may not be generally known to Vermonters." "Our State" never established any branch mint in Ulster County, N.Y., or anywhere else. The Legislature of Vermont conferred upon Reuben Harmon, jr., the exclusive right of coining copper within the State of Vermont, and in no other State. He established a mint at Rupert, where the lawful coins of Vermont, and only those, were struck.

The writer in the *Argus and Patriot* proceeds to say that attention had been directed to the subject on account of an attempt to cast odium upon the State, "because there was issued from our mint coins with the likeness of George III, and even some of them having his name." This declaration again is utterly without foundation. Neither this writer nor any other has ever give us the smallest fraction of proof that any such coins ever came from the Vermont mint. There are doubtless plenty of coins with the likeness of George III on them, and his name too, but that they were struck at the Vermont mint is the purest fiction that ever was invented.

Again, this writer informs us that Vermont was a pioneer in the matter of coining, and soon after states that Connecticut established her mint probably in the winter or spring of 1785, and that "Vermont came next." The truth is the coining of copper was authorized by Vermont in June 1785, while the Act authorizing it by Connecticut was in October following, more than three months afterward. The act of coining did not probably precede the act of legislation.

Again, he says on the adoption of the Federal Constitution in September, '87, the State mints were "compelled to wind up." Now, it happens unfortunately for this writer's historical accuracy, that Congress received official information of the ratification of the Constitution by a sufficient number of States in July, 1788, and proceedings under the Constitution did not actually commence till 1789. All the States that coined coppers at all, issued those bearing the date of 1788. They were not compelled and they do not appear to have wound up in 1787.

Again, he says, "Vermont issued no coins bearing date later than 1788, but there is *evidence* that at the Ulster County branch coins were made for Connecticut and Vermont as late as 1789." If there is any "*evidence*" as above stated, why does he not give it to us? We doubt not numismatists in Connecticut as well as in Vermont would regard such *evidence* as a great discovery, a real nugget in numismatic history. If the author has any evidence of this sort let him produce it. It is not enough to announce that he has evidence of facts of the most extraordinary character in themselves, hitherto unknown, and at the same time withhold it from the reader. History is a serious thing, and cannot be manufactured and dispensed at the will of a nameless writer. The statement therefore that there is *evidence*

that coins were struck for Connecticut and Vermont in the State of New York in 1789, must be classified with the other fancies in which the writer so largely deals.

"It was about this time (the spring of 1787)" says our author, "that young Buel, of Connecticut, arrive at Rupert with the dies of the Connecticut mint."

This statement rests upon a very feeble tradition, and is widely inconsistent with known facts. Had our author investigated the subject as he might have done, he would have found by papers in the Connecticut archives, that the General Assembly of Connecticut, in 1789 extended the privileges of their company for coining coppers from the 20th of June, 1789, to the following October. He would also have found by the report of a Committee to the legislature in 1789, that a son of Abel Buel, was, by permission of his father, at that very time carrying on the business of coining coppers. As therefore, the Connecticut dies were still in active and legitimate use in that State, it is hardly probable that young Buel had before this "arrived at Rupert with the dies of the Connecticut mint."

But again our author speaks with great emphasis of the "superior works at the Connecticut mint, which struck one hundred and twenty pieces per minute." He evidently means one hundred and twenty pieces with a single set of dies. There are persons perhaps whose credulity would not stagger at such a statement as this, but there are doubtless few. As only seventy-five silver quarters per minute are struck by steam power in the United States mint, it is hardly credible that a *hundred and twenty* of the Connecticut coppers. large and doubtless more difficult to mould, could have been struck by hand machinery in the same time. The belief of such stories is perhaps harmless, but they are not generally disseminated with entire confidence, except by that class of gentlemen who are accustomed to "draw a long bow."

Again our author says, "Well, what about the George III or Tory cent issued by Vermont? we hear the reader say. "He proceeds to give an answer to his anxious reader's supposed question, which is at least sensible, and we presume strictly true. It is as follows. viz.: "The truth is we do not know much about it." This would seem to be a good reason for bringing the discussion to a close. The reader, however, is not fortunate enough to be let off here. He proceeds to say that "there is a coin bearing date 1785 with a George III head attributed to Vermont. This is called the Tory cent."

Had the very learned writer not informed us that he did not know much about it, we should have supposed he would answer his anxious reader somewhat as follows: "I have, it is true, said that this copper has been attributed to Vermont, but I really do not know who has attributed it to Vermont. I have never been able to find any evidence that it came from Vermont, nor do I think that there is any person living who honestly believes it came from that source. Dismiss your fears, gentle reader, no treason lurks in the origin of this innocent copper." Such would undoubtedly have been the writer's reply, had not a sense of his ignorance on the subject come over him just at that moment.

But without stopping to relieve the anxiety of his reader, as would have been most proper to do, he makes haste to say "there is also an issue of 1785 with the head and name of George III., with the "Vermon Auctori." He immediately proceeds to say that the Legislature of Vermont never authorized or sanctioned any such issue. He was safe in saying this, for the very good reason, if for no other, that no such coin was ever issued at all. We venture to say that the writer has never seen the "head and name of George III, and Vermon Auctori" on the same coin. This would be a marvel in numismatics. Two obverses are rarely found on the same coin. He also informs his inquiring reader that he "thinks" in the act of 1785 Vermont did not provide for any mottoes and devices. Had the writer taken the trouble to think a second time, or more properly to look at the act on which he was commenting, he would have found that the act provided that all coppers coined by Mr. Harmon were to be "in pieces of one third of an ounce, Troy weight each, with such devices and mottoes as shall be agreed upon by the Committee appointed for that purpose by this Assembly."

But our learned writer magnifies his propensity in the most extraordinary way in the following statement: "The 1788 copper appears in direct violation of legislative authority. If any blame is to attach to Vermont, it is for not keeping entire control of her coinage, as did the other States. The truth is that the Vermont mint was a private enterprise of Harmon & Co., and used by them for their private purposes, without regard to law; for in addition to striking George III. coppers they coined an immense amount of Connecticut coppers, in violation of their charter, or patent, of October, 1786." The statements contained in the above quotations are either true, or they are unmitigated slanders. That they are true the author does not, and, we venture to say, he cannot furnish a word of proof. As one of his readers we have a right to demand that historical statement of such extraordinary character, shall come with some sort of evidence that they are true. That Mr. Harmon struck George III coppers or Connecticut coppers at his manufactory at Rupert, if true, is a transaction that can be proved. Did any one witness the manufacture of these coins, whose testimony was placed on record at the time of their alleged emission? Did anybody charge Mr. Harmon with this crime while he was living, or was it charged within fifty years after the act was perpetrated? Was there anywhisper even of suspicion for half a century after the operations of his mint were closed? Had he any motive for laying aside his lawful coinage and assuming an unlawful one? Did any body ever purchase a quantity of George III or Connecticut coppers of Mr. Harmon? Did he ever admit that he struck these false coins? Now it must be remembered that Mr. Harmon was under heavy bond not to coin any coppers within the state of Vermont, that had not upon them the mottoes and devices authorized by the law of the State. To assume that he did so is to assume that he had some overpowering motive to do it, or that he wantonly and against all motive did that which only promised ruin and disgrace to himself. Now, as there is no evidence that he was forced to either of these alternatives, the proposition of the accuser must be held to be inexcusably absurd. The truth is, the modern slander that Vermont issued coins for treasonable purposes rests upon no foundation whatever, and this new form of stating it cannot save it from an ignominious grave.

I have thus stated some of the most palpable, though by no means all, the errors into which this very extraordinary writer has fallen. In ease and freeness of movement, his style reminds one of Baron Munchausen, but I must be permitted to add that more exactness of statement, more thoroughness of research, and a more discriminating logic, would, in my opinion, have rendered his contribution more valuable to the uninstructed Vermonters.

Rupert.
Pseud



THE AUTHOR

Sanborn Partridge of Proctor, Vermont, is an educator, geologist, and history buff. He was born in Proctor on 30 April 1915. Educated in the Proctor schools, the Ecole Pascal, Paris, France and Westminster School, Simsbury, Conn. Mr. Partridge graduated in 1936 from Amherst College with a B. A. degree. Subsequently, he attended Yale, earning a J. D. in 1939, as well as a special law/business certificate awarded jointly by Yale and Harvard Business School. Ten years later he returned to Yale for an M.S. in geology, plus completing course work and orals for a Ph.D. in geology.

Mr. Partridge interrupted his education to serve his country in the Army Air Force in 1942, rising from private to 1st Lieutenant.

In community life the author of the article has at successive times taken a leadership role in many worthy causes, such as the Rutland Hospital, the Red Cross, the regional Boy Scout movement, and trusteeship of the University of Vermont. He is a member of three geological societies.

Politically Mr. Partridge served in the Vermont House for seven years and since 1969 has been a member of the State Senate from Rutland County.

Paramount among the senator's interests is the history of Vermont. He belongs to the Vermont Historical Society and three local societies within Rutland County. He is an authority on the currency and coins of Vermont, particularly of the period prior to the state joining the Union. He is a member of the American Numismatic Association, the American Numismatic Society of New York, the Canadian Numismatic Association, and patron of the Colonial Newsletter.

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Vlack, Robert A., "Early American Coins", 2nd ed., 1965, with Vermont coppers at pp. 45-49. Illustr.

von Bergen, William, "The Rare Coin Encyclopedia", 7th ed., 1906. Cf. Vermont coppers in Part 2, pp. 33-36, and Plate XX and part of Plate XXI.

White, Rev. Pliny H., "The Copper Coins of Vermont" as Item XII in "Historical Magazine", Vol. 3, Jan. 1868, pp. 32-33 . . . originally written for and appearing in "The Vermont Record" of 30 Sept. 1864.

Yeoman, Robert S., "A Guide Book of U.S. Coins", 34th Revised Ed., Kenneth E. Bressett, ed. Cf. Vermont coppers at pp. 33 and 45-46.

Concluding Note:

Over the years, many auction catalogs and fixed price lists have been generous with information about and discussions of Vermont notes and Vermont coppers. Among the more informative have been Bowers & Ruddy, New Netherlands, Numismatic & Antiquarian Service Corp. of Am. (NASCA), Pine Tree, Richard Picker, David Sonderman, and Stack's, to name a few.

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